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Ranking the top prospects (51-75)

By Keith Law
ESPN Insider

Welcome to ESPN Insider's 2012 ranking of the top 100 prospects in baseball.

This is the fifth year I have done these rankings for Insider, and for the first time, we have a repeater at No. 1 (and, as it turns out, at No. 2). There were still a number of high-profile graduations from last year's list, starting with [Eric Hosmer](#) at No. 5 and [Dustin Ackley](#) at No. 7, and a trade that saw last year's No. 4 and 21 prospects, [Jesus Montero](#) and [Michael Pineda](#), respectively, exchanged for each other earlier this offseason. This year's list benefits from a major infusion of high-end talent from the 2011 Rule 4 draft, one of the strongest draft classes in years.

The Guidelines

- The rankings are limited to players who still have rookie eligibility; that means they have yet to exceed 130 at-bats or 50 innings pitched in the majors and have not yet spent 45 days on the active roster of a major league club, excluding call-ups during the roster expansion period after Sept. 1.
- Only players who have signed professional contracts are eligible.
- I do not consider players with experience in Nippon Professional Baseball "prospects" for the purposes of this exercise, which means no Yu Darvish.
- When ranking players, I consider scouting reports on players -- usually my own, supplementing with conversations with other scouts and front-office executives as needed -- as well as performance, adjusted for age and context. I've made one adjustment in my ranking philosophy in recent years, favoring higher-upside prospects over lower-ceiling prospects who are closer to the majors. This better reflects how these players are valued now by front offices and scouting departments, and gives me a chance to deliver more information on prospects whose names or scouting reports might be new to you.
- I use the 20-80 grading scale in these comments to avoid saying "average" and "above average" thousands of times across the 100 player comments. On that scale, a grade of 50 equals major league average, 55 is above average, 60 is plus, 45 is fringy or below average and so on. [Mike Stanton](#) has 80 raw power. [Bengie Molina](#) has 20 speed. An average fastball for a right-hander is 90-92 mph, with 1-2 mph off for a lefty.
- I've included last year's rank for players who appeared in the top 100 last offseason. An "ineligible" player (IE) was still an amateur at this time last January, whereas an "unranked" player (UR) was eligible but didn't make the cut. I've also tagged players who were on last year's sleepers list or list of 10 players who just missed the cut.

Law's complete top 100: [Index](#) | [1-25](#) | [26-50](#) | [51-75](#) | [76-100](#)

Rank**Player**

Rank**Player****51 James Paxton****Age:** 23 (DOB: Nov. 6, 1988)**Bats:** Left **Throws:** Left**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Seattle Mariners**Top '11 Level:** Double-A (Jackson)**2011 ranking:** UR

Paxton, who played his college ball at Kentucky, was a top-10 talent in the 2009 draft, but didn't sign with Toronto after it took him in the sandwich round. His plan was to boost his stock with another season of college ball, but he was ruled ineligible for the 2010 season after the NCAA found him in violation of the "no-agent rule." He ended up going to Seattle as a fourth-round pick in 2010, and didn't make his pro debut until 2011.

He was dominant enough in low Class A that the Mariners jumped him two levels to Double-A, which was more appropriate given his age and experience in the SEC, and he was even more dominant after the promotion. Paxton's arm action looks long but he repeats it well and gets good angle on the fastball and breaking ball, working in the low 90s and touching 96 mph, with a much-improved changeup since his amateur days.

He hasn't thrown a ton of innings over the last few years because of the NCAA ruling that forced him to leave school, so the M's will have to work to build up his arm strength, but with the improvements in his command and changeup he looks like a potential No. 2 in a big league rotation who'll rack up a lot of strikeouts.

Rank**Player****52 Mike Montgomery****Age:** 22 (DOB: July 1, 1989)**Bats:** Left **Throws:** Left**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Kansas City Royals**Top '11 Level:** AAA (Omaha)**2011 ranking:** 28

Heading into last season Montgomery looked poised to step into the Royals' rotation by the second half of 2011, but struggles with his delivery -- and, as a result, his command -- resulted in a disappointing year in Triple-A, a level for which he was still quite young.

The good news for Kansas City fans is that Montgomery's stuff was intact, still sitting 92-95 mph and running up to 96-97 with good downhill plane. He uses his changeup as his out pitch, with excellent arm speed and the ability to command it to both sides of the plate, but his slurve breaking ball may not be more than a solid-average pitch going forward. He's had elbow issues in the past, but was healthy all of 2011, and while his ERA didn't improve in the second half, his walk rate dropped by about 40 percent.

He's 22, left-handed, with two plus pitches and experience up to Triple-A; he might need to go back to Omaha for a few months but should still at least end up in the middle

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM17
- IP95
- W6
- L3
- ERA2.37

- SO131
- BB43
- H73
- HR3
- BAA.215

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM28
- IP150.2
- W5
- L11
- ERA5.32

- SO129
- BB69
- H157
- HR15
- BAA.271

of a big league rotation.

Rank

Player

53 Oscar Taveras

Age: 19 (DOB: June 19, 1992)

Bats: Left **Throws:** Left

Position: Outfield

Organization: St. Louis Cardinals

Top '11 Level: A (Quad Cities)

2011 ranking: UR

Taveras played a little over half a season in the Midwest League, and led the league in batting average, on-base percentage and slugging with a very high contact rate despite a crazy swing.

He loads his hands high and deep, keeping them steady as he starts his stride, even letting them drift higher before he starts his hands -- but his hand acceleration is explosive. He's very rotational, and likes to get his arms fully extended no matter where the ball is, which should leave him vulnerable on the inner half and will make it harder for him to make adjustments. He can end up off balance from the force of the swing, and max-effort swings like this are rare in the big leagues; however, hand-eye coordination like Taveras' is pretty rare, and the fact that he makes so much contact, most of it hard, is a huge positive. He's a potential middle-of-the-order bat with some defensive value in right.

Rank

Player

54 Daniel Corcino

Age: 21 (DOB: Aug. 26, 1990)

Bats: Right **Throws:** Right

Position: Pitcher

Organization: Cincinnati Reds

Top '11 Level: A (Dayton)

2011 ranking: UR

Corcino, who's listed at 5-11, 165 pounds, isn't big -- he gets both physical and stuff comparisons to Johnny Cueto -- but he dominated the Midwest League and has been a frequent target for other clubs talking trades with the Reds.

He will work from 92 to 96 mph with a plus changeup and a very aggressive approach with both pitches; he still needs to refine his breaking ball, which is where the Cueto comparison breaks down, but if that pitch comes this year Corcino could move just as quickly through the higher levels.

It was a funny year -- he was lit up in his first two starts in Dayton and his final one, but posted a 2.62 ERA in between, with 146 strikeouts and 29 walks in 127 innings. His arm is extremely quick, but there's some effort from a slot just below three-quarters, and because he lands on the first-base side of the rubber he comes across his body a little bit.

His command, aggressiveness and two plus pitches really set him apart, and he could probably handle a jump

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM78
- AB308
- HR8
- RBI62
- SB1
- SO52
- BB32
- AVG.386
- OBP.444
- SLG.584

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM26
- IP139.1
- W11
- L7
- ERA3.42
- SO156
- BB34
- H128
- HR10
- BAA.238

to Double-A, which would allow him to avoid the hitters' haven of Bakersfield, Cincy's high Class A affiliate.

Rank Player

55 Gary Sanchez

Age: 19 (DOB: Dec. 2, 1992)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Catcher

Organization: New York Yankees
Top '11 Level: A (Charleston)
2011 ranking: 68

Sanchez's first full year in pro ball had major positives and negatives -- the bat is more advanced than anyone thought, and the glove is less so.

He can really hit with present above-average power and projects to hit 30 to 35 homers a year down the road, having demonstrated a solid approach for an 18-year-old in full-season ball. Sanchez's priority is working on his bat, and his glove has lagged; he has arm strength, and has a better chance to remain a catcher than former Yankees prospect Jesus Montero, but Sanchez's receiving was terrible last year and he'll need to spend more time working on all aspects of his defense besides throwing. Sanchez's immaturity showed up publicly last year, as he was suspended for attitude issues, and while we can forgive him his youth, if it's affecting his play on the field, it affects his outlook until he matures.

He could be a star, the worthy successor to Jorge Posada, if he puts the effort into learning his craft behind the plate.

Rank Player

56 Jonathan Schoop

Age: 20 (DOB: Oct. 16, 1991)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Infield

Organization: Baltimore Orioles
Top '11 Level: A (Frederick)
2011 ranking: UR

Schoop (pronounced "skoep," which rhymes with "Knobe 2012") is a future power hitter in search of a permanent position, spending time last year at third base, shortstop and eventually second base after a surprise promotion to high Class A at age 19.

He gets great extension through the zone, controlling the bat head well, with a balanced, rotational swing that should produce power as he matures. He's a below-average runner who was signed as a shortstop but is likely to outgrow the position; he has the arm for third base and the bat profiles there, so the question is whether the Orioles want to push him to second base for more upside while risking injury. I'd leave him at third and let him focus on hitting, which he does quite well.

An interesting quirk in his stats after the promotion to high-A: He went homerless and hit just .218/.290/.259 in his first 38 games there, but hit .322/.368/.487 with five homers afterwards. That's a sign he knows how to make adjustments.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM82
- AB301
- HR17
- RBI52
- SB2
- SO93
- BB36
- AVG.256
- OBP.335
- SLG.485

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM128
- AB511
- HR13
- RBI71
- SB12
- SO76
- BB42
- AVG.290
- OBP.349
- SLG.432

Rank**Player****57 Nick Franklin****Age:** 20 (DOB: Mar. 2, 1991)**Bats:** Both **Throws:** Right**Position:** Shortstop**Organization:** Seattle Mariners**Top '11 Level:** AA (Jackson)**2011 ranking:** 53

Franklin's season was ruined by factors not likely to affect his long-term development other than the at-bats he lost to injury and illness.

He's a switch-hitter whose right-handed swing is prettier, but he is a much better hitter left-handed -- hitting, power and patience -- despite the fact that he overstrides badly and his back side tends to collapse. He's a good athlete with the arm to handle short; his feet aren't ideal for the position but he has the instincts to handle it in the majors, and so far he's shown he can make all of the critical plays. He's a high-energy player who gets great marks for on-field makeup and aptitude, and if he can avoid the infirmary -- his 2011 was marred by a broken jaw, food poisoning and mono -- he shouldn't lose too much from the half-season off.

If he eventually has to move to second base he still has the ability to be an above-average regular there. At short he has a better chance to be a star because the baseline for that position is so low.

Rank**Player****58 Taylor Jungmann****Age:** 22 (DOB: Dec. 18, 1989)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Milwaukee Brewers**Top '11 Level:** College (Texas)**2011 ranking:** IE

Jungmann doesn't have the high ceiling of many of the names on this list, but is a very high-probability mid-rotation starter because of his command and relative lack of effort in his delivery.

He can sit 91-93 mph but go back for 94-95 whenever he wants it, and he pairs it with a hammer curveball at 75-78 with two-plane break, as well as a hard changeup he rarely used in college. He's a strike-thrower who commands the ball to both sides of the plate, including the breaking ball. He comes across his body slightly because he starts on the extreme third-base side of the rubber, but lands on line to the plate as if he'd started in the center. The Brewers selected him 12th overall in last June's draft, but a few teams weren't on him as a first-rounder because of some head violence in his delivery after he releases the ball, which might not be great for his health but is late enough that it doesn't affect his command. Jungmann doesn't use his lower half as much as most power pitchers, and lengthening his stride might add a little velocity.

He profiles as a solid No. 3 starter with a chance to pitch above that because he pounds the zone and is aggressive within it.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM88
- AB352
- HR7
- RBI26
- SB18
- SO80
- BB37
- AVG.281
- OBP.352
- SLG.418

2011 COLLEGE STATS

- GM19
- IP141
- W13
- L3
- ERA1.60
- SO126
- BB36
- H81
- HR4
- BAA.165

Rank**Player****59 Anthony Gose****Age:** 21 (DOB: Aug. 10, 1990)**Bats:** Left **Throws:** Left**Position:** Center field**Organization:** Toronto Blue Jays**Top '11 Level:** AA (New Hampshire)**2011 ranking:** UR

Gose isn't a finished product, but he has made enormous strides in the 18 months since Toronto acquired him from Philadelphia by way of Houston, and is young enough that forecasting additional growth for him makes sense.

He is a 70 runner with an 80 arm who can run everything down in center field. In high school he was all tools and had no clue as a hitter -- he was an uncoordinated hacker with no consistency to his stance or weight transfer. Now Gose stays back better and repeats his swing in a way he couldn't before, resulting in higher-quality contact and the chance for average power. His two-strike approach still needs work -- because it doesn't really exist -- and the Blue Jays want to have him work more on shooting the ball to left and even on bunting for hits to make use of his speed.

His defense alone makes him a big leaguer, and even a modest improvement in the two-strike approach makes him a regular, with an All-Star ceiling if he continues to make these large adjustments.

Rank**Player****60 George Springer****Age:** 22 (DOB: Sept. 19, 1989)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Outfield**Organization:** Houston Astros**Top '11 Level:** A (Tri-City)**2011 ranking:** UR

Springer -- whom the Astros took with the 11th pick last June -- was one of the toolsiest college position players I've ever come across, with a solid idea of what he was doing at the plate, sliding out of the top 10 only because of questions about his swing mechanics.

The UConn product is an outstanding athlete, an above-average runner with a plus arm and plus raw power. He has tremendous bat speed and can turn on good velocity, with a history of running deep counts although without much of a two-strike approach. For some reason, he started swinging uphill this spring, collapsing his back side in the process and reducing the quality of his contact and leading to concerns that he'll swing and miss too much in pro ball. Perhaps it was "draftitis," trying to hit more home runs to improve his stock, but it's a bad habit and not an easy one to break.

If he gets back to where he was a year ago, Houston got a steal, an impact hitter who hits for power, gets on base, and adds value through right-field defense.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM137
- AB509
- HR16
- RBI59
- SB70
- SO154
- BB62
- AVG.253
- OBP.349
- SLG.415

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM8
- AB28
- HR1
- RBI3
- SB4
- SO2
- BB2
- AVG.179
- OBP.303
- SLG.393

Rank**Player****61 Allen Webster****Age:** 21 (DOB: Feb. 10, 1990)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Los Angeles Dodgers**Top '11 Level:** AA (Chattanooga)**2011 ranking:** UR

Webster is a converted shortstop who barely pitched in high school but has separated himself from the Dodgers' crop of high-ceiling arms with a great changeup and pretty good feel for pitching for a former position player.

He has excellent arm action and gets on top of the ball well to get sink on his fastball and great deception on a plus-plus changeup, meaning he gets ground balls and has no platoon split to worry about. His slider and curve are both fringe-average at the moment, and his velocity is also solid-average at 90-94, although he'll run it up to 98 from time to time. He's a good athlete who handles his position well and could gain a grade on the fastball if he fills out a little more.

Webster needs repetitions more than anything else, to help refine his command and develop one or both breaking balls, but the sink and the one plus secondary pitch give him a mid-rotation ceiling now with the chance for more.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM27
- IP145
- W11
- L5
- ERA4.03
- SO135
- BB57
- H147
- HR9
- BAA.265

Rank**Player****62 Xander Bogaerts****Age:** 19 (DOB: Oct. 1, 1992)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Shortstop**Organization:** Boston Red Sox**Top '11 Level:** A (Greenville)**2011 ranking:** Sleeper

The Red Sox were aggressive with the Aruban-born Bogaerts, promoting him from the Dominican Summer League right to full-season ball, where only Jurickson Profar and Bryce Harper were younger among regular position players. But Bogaerts held his own due to excellent bat speed and enough pitch recognition to keep himself afloat. He starts out very wide at the plate and closes slightly when he gets his front foot down. The ball really comes off his bat well, thanks to strong wrists and forearms and a very rotational swing with great extension through contact.

He spent the year at shortstop, making an error every three games, but isn't likely to stay there with third base the probable destination. He has the arm and feet for it, assuming he does indeed outgrow shortstop. Boston's system is thin right now, with several prospects who project as solid regulars but nothing more. Bogaerts is the Red Sox's best chance right now to produce an All-Star.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM72
- AB265
- HR16
- RBI45
- SB1
- SO71
- BB25
- AVG.260
- OBP.324
- SLG.509

Rank**Player**

Rank**Player****63 Chris Archer****Age:** 23 (DOB: Sept. 6, 1988)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Tampa Bay Rays**Top '11 Level:** AAA (Durham)**2011 ranking:** 40

Archer's numbers were less than sterling last year, but the stuff and athleticism are intact and some adjustments he made late in the year give some hope that he'll return to form in 2012.

His fastball still sits at 93-95 mph as a starter, but he became overreliant on his very sharp slider last year rather than working to set hitters up and get to counts where it would be most effective. He's touched 97 and his slider, which can be toxic, has hit 89, so he can miss bats in some role. He is an extremely athletic pitcher whose arm works well, with the downside of a dominant two-pitch reliever. He still has that No. 2 starter upside, but he's not out of the prospect danger zone yet and it wouldn't be inappropriate to project him as a closer.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM27
- IP147.1
- W9
- L7
- ERA4.09
- SO130
- BB86
- H147
- HR11
- BAA.263

Rank**Player****64 Billy Hamilton****Age:** 21 (DOB: Sept. 9, 1990)**Bats:** Both **Throws:** Right**Position:** Shortstop**Organization:** Cincinnati Reds**Top '11 Level:** A (Dayton)**2011 ranking:** 51

Hamilton's run grade isn't just an 8 -- it goes to 11. After minor arms trouble limited him in 2010, he stayed healthy for a full season in 2011 and had an incredible 103 stolen bases in 135 games.

He improved over the course of the season as he made adjustments and the weather warmed up. He's a natural right-handed hitter, but was better from the left side in 2011, laying off high fastballs that he previously would just pop up; as a left-handed hitter he's a half-step closer to first and could rack up a mess of infield hits just by bunting or shooting the ball to the left side. He has well below-average power and probably won't ever reach the average mark, and while he has the feet and speed for shortstop, he throws from a low slot that isn't ideal for the longer throw from that side of second base.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM135
- AB550
- HR3
- RBI50
- SB103
- SO133
- BB52
- AVG.278
- OBP.340
- SLG.360

He has game-changing speed, however, and a .312/.382/.387 second half with a much better contact rate gives hope that he'll come out strongly in the hitter-friendly Cal League in 2012.

Rank**Player**

Rank**Player****65 Yasmani Grandal****Age:** 23 (DOB: Nov. 8, 1988)**Bats:** Both **Throws:** Right**Position:** Catcher**Organization:** San Diego Padres**Top '11 Level:** AAA (Louisville)**2011 ranking:** 59

I see two potential outcomes for Grandal without much chance he falls in between the two: He's either an All-Star catcher, or a fringy backup who can't receive well enough to play every day but whose bat doesn't profile at first.

Grandal's left-handed swing has better bat speed and more loft than his right-handed swing, which, while playable, is going to produce sizable platoon splits against better pitching, particularly in the power department. The big disappointment with Grandal last year was his receiving; he was always considered a plus defensive catcher in college because of his arm, accuracy and game-calling experience, but he struggled throughout the year and in the Arizona Fall League to catch better velocity he hadn't had to catch as an amateur. He is a disciplined hitter with patience and a good eye, again better from the left side than from the right, and earns high marks for his overall feel for the game.

If the receiving problems were an aberration, he was an outstanding pickup for the Padres -- who got him in the Mat Latos deal -- and perhaps that blip is what made him available. Unfortunately the downside, if they weren't an aberration, is substantial.

Rank**Player****66 Zack Cox****Age:** 22 (DOB: May 9, 1989)**Bats:** Left **Throws:** Right**Position:** Third base**Organization:** St. Louis Cardinals**Top '11 Level:** AA (Springfield)**2011 ranking:** 72

Cox went through two levels in 2011, struggling in his first month at each level and then exploding afterwards, hitting for average and power, walking more and striking out less, and generally showing the ability to make adjustments on the fly.

He's cleaned up his swing and keeps his head steady, much like he did as an underclassman at Arkansas, so pitchers can't bust him inside as easily. He'll show above-average raw power in BP, but so far it's not translating to games, at least partly because he focuses on using the whole field and doesn't try to turn on pitches on the inner half. At third base, he'll never be above-average but should be adequate; many of his miscues last year came on popups, of all things, and he does have a plus arm. He did show a platoon split all season -- all 13 of his homers last year came against righties -- and he still has to work on defense and getting that power to play after the game starts.

There's a potential above-average regular here who'll hit for average and power, but if he has to move to first

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM105
- AB374
- HR14
- RBI68
- SB0
- SO97
- BB59
- AVG.305
- OBP.401
- SLG.500

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM135
- AB516
- HR13
- RBI68
- SB2
- SO98
- BB40
- AVG.306
- OBP.363
- SLG.434

base he'll be off this list.

Rank

Player

67 Josh Bell

Age: 19 (DOB: Aug. 14, 1992)

Bats: Both **Throws:** Right

Position: Outfield

Organization: Pittsburgh Pirates

Top '11 Level: Prep (Dallas Jesuit)

2011 ranking: IE

One of the most exciting high school hitters in last year's draft -- which, for all its strengths, wasn't great for prep bats -- Bell stunned the industry by taking a \$5 million signing bonus from the Pirates after claiming before the draft that he wasn't signing at any price and was headed to the University of Texas. **2011 HIGH SCHOOL STATS**

- GM44
- ABNA
- HR14
- RBI55
- SB19
- SONA
- BBNA
- AVG.552
- OBP.687
- SLG1.073

As a left-handed hitter, Bell reminds me of Jason Heyward (before the shoulder injury), with leverage for all-fields power and unusual hand acceleration that allows him to let the ball travel deeper before he commits to a swing. His right-handed swing isn't as quick or smooth, and he's probably a left fielder due to below-average run and arm tools. But the bat, while a few years off, has the ceiling of an All-Star even at an offense-first position, with power, average and the promise at least of some patience as well.

Rank

Player

68 Gary Brown

Age: 23 (DOB: Sept. 28, 1988)

Bats: Right **Throws:** Right

Position: Outfield

Organization: San Francisco

Top '11 Level: A (San Jose)

2011 ranking: UR

Brown is at least a 70 runner who covers a ton of ground in center field and profiles as an above-average regular in the big leagues because of the value he'll add on defense. **2011 MINORS STATS**

- GM131
- AB559
- HR14
- RBI80
- SB53
- SO77
- BB46
- AVG.336
- OBP.407
- SLG.519

He is one of the fastest right-handed hitters I've ever clocked from home to first -- the fastest is the prospect at the top of this list -- and his hands are very quick, allowing him to stay inside the ball well. But his swing is very linear and he doesn't let the ball travel, so there's not much present or future power here. And while he makes a ton of contact he's never been a high-walk guy to potentially generate .400 OBPs.

He'll probably end up cast as a leadoff type because of his speed, but I see more of a .300 hitter without great secondary skills who saves 10 runs a year with his glove in center.

Rank

Player

Rank**Player****69 Yonder Alonso****Age:** 24 (DOB: Apr. 8, 1987)**Bats:** Left **Throws:** Right**Position:** First base**Organization:** San Diego Padres**Top '11 Level:** Majors (Reds)**2011 ranking:** 65

Alonso's power hasn't bounced back all the way from a broken hamate bone he suffered in July 2009, but I still think he's at least a 20-to-25 homer guy who profiles as an average to above-average first baseman in the long run.

He has good balance at the plate with plenty of hip rotation to drive the ball, but his bat speed is just solid-average and until 2011 he had never hit left-handed pitching well. His .330/.398/.585 line in his brief big league call-up isn't indicative of how he'll perform in the short term, especially since he barely saw any left-handed pitching, but he could end up a .280/.360/.500 guy going forward. He's an adequate defender at first who should never be allowed to try left field again.

He was blocked by Joey Votto in Cincinnati, but was sent to San Diego this winter as part of the Mat Latos deal, and he should be the Padres' first baseman on Opening Day. Assuming Petco doesn't flatten him, he's got enough bat to have value at first base, but won't be a star unless he finds more power than expected or closes his platoon split.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM91
- AB358
- HR12
- RBI56
- SB6
- SO60
- BB46
- AVG.296
- OBP.374
- SLG.486

Rank**Player****70 Garrett Richards****Age:** 23 (DOB: May. 27, 1988)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Los Angeles Angels**Top '11 Level:** Majors (Angels)**2011 ranking:** UR

Richards' wildness in college has disappeared since the Angels took him 42nd overall in the 2009 draft out of Oklahoma, pushing him to a major league debut in just his second full year in pro ball.

He works with a 70 fastball as a starter, pitching at 94-100 mph, with an inconsistent, short, 84-87 mph slider that ranges from solid-average to plus, and some feel for a changeup. He holds his velocity deep into games and works in the lower half of the zone to generate some ground balls. The changeup is solid-average, without much action but with good arm speed. Richards' arm is loose and easy, with the path a little long but with nothing to prevent him from working as a starter. It's not clear why a guy with this kind of stuff doesn't generate more strikeouts, and the low ERA in the minors last season was at least partly a function of a very pitcher-friendly home park at Double-A Arkansas.

He has No. 2 starter stuff, but may be a backend guy if he can't rack up more strikeouts.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM22
- IP143
- W12
- L2
- ERA3.15
- SO103
- BB40
- H123
- HR10
- BAA.233

Rank**Player**

Rank**Player****71 Jake Odorizzi****Age:** 21 (DOB: March 27, 1990)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Pitcher**Organization:** Kansas City Royals**Top '11 Level:** AA (Northwest Arkansas)**2011 ranking:** Ten who missed

Odorizzi came over to Kansas City in the Zack Greinke trade and fits the Casey Kelly/Zach Lee mold of a supreme athlete with a pretty delivery but doesn't miss enough bats with his secondary stuff, at least not yet. His real calling card is his command, especially of the fastball, which is key because his velocity is typically in the low 90s, not the 95-96 range where his command wouldn't have to be as fine. The lack of life on the pitch really hurt him in AA, where he became fly ball- and homer-prone. He's still throwing both a curve and slider; it's a curveball arm slot, but his curve is on the slow side while the slider gives him something to get under a left-handed hitter's hands.

Neither is an above-average pitch for him yet, and he may be better off choosing one and scrapping the other. He does have a solid-average changeup with good feel for the pitch, and the delivery is smooth and easy to repeat with minimal effort. He has a No. 2/3 ceiling but has to make one of two adjustments to get there -- either he learns to work down in the zone with the fastball or one of the breaking balls develops to the point where it misses bats.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM27
- IP147
- W10
- L7
- ERA3.73
- SO157
- BB44
- H134
- HR17
- BAA.244

Rank**Player****72 Starling Marte****Age:** 22 (DOB: Oct. 9, 1988)**Bats:** Right **Throws:** Right**Position:** Center field**Organization:** Pittsburgh Pirates**Top '11 Level:** AA (Altoona)**2010 ranking:** UR

Marte has tremendous tools and has moved aggressively through Pittsburgh's system despite a real lack of polish at the plate that makes him a very high-beta prospect. He could end up a 60 (occasional All-Star), and he could end up a 45 (fourth outfielder), without a whole lot of in between. At the plate, Marte has quick wrists and can hit a good fastball, but he has no stride and limited weight transfer. His hips glide forward, but he is very rotational with good extension, so getting his legs involved could produce above-average power.

He's a plus runner but not a good instinctive baserunner yet, in line with his lack of discipline at the plate. His 19 unintentional walks last year represented a career best for Marte in a single season, giving him 44 in more than 1,100 plate appearances since he came to the U.S.

Word is that the Pirates and Royals have been discussing a merger not just of franchises, but of players, led by hybrid center fielder Bubba Starling Marte, a player so talented that even his tools would have tools. If that falls through, the Pirates might have a successor to Andrew McCutchen, or just a maddening bench guy who looks like he should be a star.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM129
- AB536
- HR12
- RBI50
- SB24
- SO100
- BB22
- AVG.332
- OBP.370
- SLG.500

Rank**Player****73 Sonny Gray**

Age: 22 (DOB: Nov. 7, 1989)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: Oakland Athletics
Top '11 Level: AA (Midland)
2011 ranking: IE

Gray was a controversial guy in last year's draft given his certain first-round status, with some clubs seeing a sub-6-foot right-hander who projected as a closer. But others -- including Oakland -- saw plus makeup and an aggressive starter with three weapons including a hammer curveball that will miss big league bats. I incline toward the latter view, as starters who can pitch at 91-94 and dial up more when needed with that kind of curveball and a pretty good split-like changeup are hard to find.

The concerns I have on Gray are that there's some effort in his delivery, with late elbow pronation, and his fastball doesn't have much plane because he's not that tall. However, his velocity comes mostly from a big stride toward the plate, not from his upper half. As for plane, he does try to work down in the zone and had a strong ground-ball rate in his brief time in AA.

It was a tiny sample, but he faced 70 batters for Midland and gave up just one extra-base hit. I understand why scouts see him as a reliever, but there's plenty of chance here for him to be not just a starter, but a good one in the top three spots in a rotation, and I wouldn't bet against a competitor like Gray.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM6
- IP22
- W1
- L1
- ERA0.82
- SO20
- BB6
- H19
- HR0
- BAA.241

Rank**Player****74 Tyrell Jenkins**

Age: 19 (DOB: July 20, 1992)
Bats: Right **Throws:** Right
Position: Pitcher

Organization: St. Louis Cardinals
Top '11 Level: Rookie (Johnson City)
2011 ranking: Sleeper

Jenkins was a three-sport star in high school who turned down a commitment to Baylor in favor of the long road to the majors (and a \$1.3 million bonus) that could culminate in a spot at or near the top of a rotation. Jenkins is, as you'd imagine, extremely athletic, but had less baseball experience than the typical U.S. high school pitching prospect. So the Cardinals have taken it slowly with him, holding off his full-season debut until this upcoming season. He'll pitch in the low 90s but can touch 96-97. His curveball is already above-average, and the changeup has developed substantially in his year-plus in St. Louis' system.

Jenkins' control is solid -- he never walked more than two men in any of his 11 outings last year -- but his command is still a work in progress as the Cardinals work with him on consistency in his delivery. He has a high leg kick and stays online to the plate, getting good extension out front that gives the hitter even less time than normal to pick up the pitch. He's also a strong competitor who

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM11
- IP56
- W4
- L2
- ERA3.86
- SO55
- BB13
- H63
- HR3
- BAA.296

is willing to mix all his pitches and won't back off a pitch if he makes a mistake with it. He's not polished enough yet to be in the top third of this list, but a full season of pitching and the progress that should come with it would make him one of the top pitching prospects in baseball.

Rank

Player

75 Mike Olt

Age: 23 (DOB: Aug. 27, 1988)

Bats: Right **Throws:** Right

Position: Third base

Organization: Texas Rangers

Top '11 Level: A (Myrtle Beach)

2010 ranking: UR

A potentially plus defender at third with plus raw power, Olt has seen the ball much better as a pro than he did as an amateur, resulting in better-than-expected plate discipline that gives him a chance to be at least an average regular at third. Olt can launch balls in BP, but his approach is now less pull-happy than it was in college, with very good bat speed and great extension on his follow-through for power to left and the ability to use the middle of the field.

He missed two months this summer with a broken collarbone, but was 100 percent again for fall league and led the AFL in home runs (helped by a very homer-friendly ballpark). His contact rates probably won't ever be great, but even an average hit tool with plus power and defense at third makes for a fringe star.

2011 MINORS STATS

- GM73
- AB254
- HR15
- RBI46
- SB0
- SO75
- BB49
- AVG.264
- OBP.381
- SLG.500

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Keith Law, formerly the special assistant to the general manager for the Toronto Blue Jays, is the senior baseball analyst for ESPN Insider.